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SPECIAL ISSUE PAPER

Editorial introduction: Putting rural stayers in the spotlight

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society is characterised by mobility (Sheller & Urry, 2006). As Erickson, Sanders, and Cope (2018) contend

geographic mobility has come to be characterised as a new normal. In short, modern life is mobile life.

Mobility now predominates within everyday life and consciousness (Halfacree, 2012): "... it is becoming the spirit of our times—its *zeitgeist*" (Barcus & Halfacree, 2018: 98). Indeed, mobility has displaced fixity as the norm and includes not only residential migration but also more mundane everyday mobilities. It is a response to the functional demands of neo-liberal capitalism.

It is not surprising that geographers and other behavioural and social scientists have paid greater attention to mobility and migration than to immobility and staying. This, however, may be beginning to change. In the context of the so-called "mobility turn" in the social sciences (Cooke, 2011; Coulter, Ham, & Findlay, 2016; Sheller & Urry, 2006) there have been recent calls to rethink residential mobility and to pay greater attention to immobility (Coulter et al., 2016). Cooke (2011: 203), for example, alleges that

... the time may be right to attack the "grand narrative" of hypermobility, modernity and dislocation and call for social and behavioural scientists to ask new questions not just about migration but also about immobility.

This special issue builds on such calls by *putting stayers in the spotlight*. It demonstrates that immobility is not only worthy of study in its own right but also represents a rich vein of research opportunities. Justification for the special issue centres on three main critiques of the literature. First, staying has received considerably less attention

when compared to the volume of research published on migration, and moreover, the attention that staying has received largely adopts a migration perspective. Too few studies focus on actual stayers and the processes of staying. Second, from a migration perspective staying is too frequently portrayed in negative terms. To stay, especially in a rural context, is perceived as being stuck or staying behind. Third, many studies ignore spatial dimensions to staying and, consequently, that place matters. Therefore, in this special issue, we chose to put *rural stayers in the spotlight*. Rural areas are comprised not only of distinct communities possessing strong ties and identities, but also diverse migration/staying cultures. Moreover, in depopulating rural regions especially, it is the people who stay that are important for maintaining rural quality of life and for the sustainability of rural communities.

2 | RETHINKING IMMOBILITY AND STAYING

Remarkably, few studies engage directly with immobility and actual stayers (relative to the volume of publications relating to migration and migrants). This is no doubt a product of the prevalent migration perspective that has been taken, to date, on immobility. We are critical of this dominant migration perspective. First, it treats immobility/staying as a residual to migration (Thomas, Stillwell, & Gould, 2016). Immobility is perceived as little more than the absence of movement or a decline in migration behaviour: neither of which will shift the primary research focus from migration to immobility. Second, the literature on migration intentions and residential preferences (Bjarnason, 2014; de Groot, Mulder, Das, & Manting, 2011; Kuhmonen, Kuhmonen, & Luoto, 2016; Petrin, Schafft, & Meece, 2014) confirms that residential intentions do not always translate into actual moves, yet the processes of staying have attracted little academic attention. Third, migration

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discourse commonly devalues staying (especially in the countryside) and equates immobility to a “failure to leave” (Looker & Naylor, 2009) or to “stay behind” (Ni Laoire, 2001). Regarding rural young adults, for example, there is a culture of out-migration: parents actively encourage adolescents to leave (Tucker, Sharp, Stracuzzi, Van Gundy, & Rebellon, 2013) and communities accept “the need to move to get on” (Nugin, 2014). At the other end of the life course, those who stay are perceived as vulnerable or disadvantaged, especially when family support networks may have moved elsewhere and the area lacks the required facilities to support ageing in place (Fernandez-Carro & Evandrou, 2014).

We allege that considering immobility from such a migration perspective is to view staying all too negatively. It not only ignores that several recent studies identify immobility as an emerging trend (Champion & Shuttleworth, 2017; Cooke, 2013a), with the possible exception of 16–24 year olds (Smith & Sage, 2014) but, importantly, it also ignores the agency of stayers themselves and the possible blurred character of (im)mobility. In this special issue, we call for a rethinking of immobility and staying, and take as our starting point that immobility is much more than non-migrants who simply stay-put: those who stay are not passive observers of their own fates. Accordingly, we call for the adoption of an *immobility perspective*: a perspective that considers stayers as active participants and staying as an active process. In other words, staying is a conscious and deliberate decision with positive outcomes. Prior studies of note include Barcus and Brunn (2009), Fernandez-Carro and Evandrou (2014), Hjalm (2014), Jamieson (2000), and Roin (2015). These distinguish between immobility as a nuanced choice (stillness) and a product of constraints (stuckness; Cresswell, 2012) and, accordingly, acknowledge structural influences and the agency of stayers in the decision to stay. Nevertheless, there is a need for the topics of immobility and staying to be given greater priority among geographers and other social scientists.

The study of immobility and staying should be reconsidered in other ways too. Much of the (limited) literature on staying or immobility to date relates to the transition to adulthood life stage and leaving the parental home. Especially in rural areas, this specific life course transition is frequently reported as a one-off choice to stay (or leave). Notable exceptions are Hjalm's (2014) research with over 60 year olds who have lived their whole life in an urban area of Sweden, and Cooke's (2013b) analysis of tied stayers and tied migrants using data from the US Panel Study of Income Dynamics. However, the predominance of studies based on young adults ignores that the motivations for staying, the factors influencing this decision, and the experiences of those who stay are likely to be very different among those making the transition to adulthood, household and family formation, empty-nest, retirement, and later life. Just as key life stage transitions are “triggers” for migration (Clark, 2013; Geist & McManus, 2008; Rossi, 1955) so too are they for staying. We call for a rethinking of immobility/ staying as part of a life strategy with the decision to stay (or leave) made multiple times over the course of a lifetime. To reiterate Hjalm (2014: 579), researchers should

acknowledge that staying is as diverse and ongoing a phenomenon as moving. It is not a decision that is made once and never renegotiated.

Moreover, some individuals, couples and families may move between migrant and stayer status with the arrival of a new life stage

(Haartsen & Thissen, 2014), others may desire to move but remain immobile (Coulter, 2013), and yet others may desire to stay but are unable to do so. The study of immobility and staying should consider the multiple decisions involved, contributing factors, and the aspirations and ability to stay at different life stages. As noted by Kuhmonen et al. (2016:91)

... in order for someone to stay in or move into a specific rural area, there has to be an adequate fit between the personal motivations and resources, and the place-specific opportunities.

Halfacree and Rivera (2012) pose an interesting related question: how come those moving to the countryside stay? Such a question further acknowledges that migration and immobility are not static or rigid dichotomies but instead are fluid states for the individual, couple or family. With such fluidity, however, further questions arise: how is a stayer defined? How long must one stay to become a stayer? From a migration perspective a stayer is commonly defined as someone who has been “born and bred” in the area and never left (that is, a lifetime non-mover) or someone who has not moved within the researcher's pre-defined time period (which might be 1 year, 10 years etc). However, if we adopt an immobility perspective, it is not so much the duration of stay that is important but so too becomes the diversity of stayer types, the processes of staying, the staying place, and the perceptions of stayers.

In particular, spatial aspects of immobility and staying need to go beyond geographical boundaries. The decision-making processes and the experiences of staying will be different among those who stay in the dwelling of their childhood, who leave their childhood home but stay in the home area, those who at old age stay in the dwelling/area that they moved to at an earlier life stage (such as, union or family formation), and those who stay in the same type of area as their home place, for example, the rural but not necessarily their home rural area. Place matters and the staying place provides opportunities for research. It is likely that there are multiple levels, scales and dimensions to staying and indeed different self, family and peer perceptions of staying which have yet to be adequately researched. Regarding perceptions, is the young adult who leaves their rural parental home to move to an urban centre in the same district or region a stayer or a mover? Is the adult who lives elsewhere during the week for higher education or employment, but returns “home” at weekends a stayer or mover? Is the family that moves from one rural area to another a stayer or mover? By adopting an immobility perspective, that focuses on the processes of staying (rather than on why they did *not* move), we recognise the agency of stayers, different spatial aspects to staying, and perceptions of staying. In addition, stayers by definition may not be immobile. Instead, daily life mobilities and virtual mobilities may enable stayers to stay and, in some geographical contexts, the migration of some family members may allow others to remain.

Other aspects of rural place have reportedly influenced the decision to move or stay (especially among young adults). Recurring themes include the physical and social characteristics of place (Mellander, Florida, & Stolarick, 2011) alongside the roles of family, friends and community in developing not only a sense of home, place attachment, belonging and rootedness (Haukanes, 2013; Roin, 2015) but a culture of migration or staying (Nugin, 2014; Thissen,

Droogleever Fortuijn, Strijker, & Haartsen, 2010). What is absent from this literature is how aspects of place intersect with the staying process or, to borrow a phrase from Antonish (2010:130), what are the stayers' "personal moments of place": how do personal and socio-spatial place meanings relate to the ways place becomes a home place and a place to stay. Indeed, such personal place experiences of staying, how these vary across the life course, and their impact on the re-negotiation of the decision to stay have not been fully explored. Aspects of place are embedded in the concept of rurality which will hold different meanings at different life stages and, consequently, impact on the decision to stay. Again, by placing an emphasis on stayers and the processes of staying (an immobility perspective) the role of place and, accordingly, that place matters can be better understood.

In this special issue, by putting *actual rural stayers in the spotlight*, we bring immobility centre-stage, and portray staying as a conscious decision, a positive process and a potentially positive experience. In short, this special issue adopts an immobility perspective (in contrast to the more common migration perspective to date) to shed not only new insights on immobility/staying but also to propose a new research agenda.

3 | OVERVIEW OF THE PAPERS

This collection of papers brings together leading researchers from different disciplines and geographical contexts to report contemporary thinking on immobility and the "processes of staying," and to propose a future research agenda. In assembling our authors, we deliberately invited: (a) experts in the field (rather than from any one discipline), (b) those that adopt a strong life course or life strategy approach, (c) those with access to national datasets which could be analysed for immobility and staying (but may not have been before), (d) those offering a more qualitative perspective on the decision to stay and staying experiences, and (e) those providing different geographical, economic, social, and cultural contexts. With this in mind, we now introduce the six papers that follow.

In the first paper, Erickson et al., 2018 use a dataset from the Montana Health Matters Survey to explore differences between stayers and nonstayers in urban, rural, and highly rural communities. They identify community and individual predictors to staying and conceptualise staying as a deliberate choice with each life transition representing a "decision point" regarding mobility. They also suggest that the social networks and social capital of stayers can be invaluable to policymakers to recruit and attract external resources: stayers are, therefore, a bridging link to outside people and capital.

The collection then moves on to report on the decision to stay at different life stages, stayers' lived experiences, and the positive role of stayers in facilitating rural place attachments and identities.

The second (Mata-Codesal, 2018) and third (Ye, 2018) papers amply demonstrate, through ethnographic studies, that the decision-making processes and the experiences of stayers are part of complex family life strategies. Mata-Codesal, 2018 adapts the aspiration/ability model (Carling, 2002) to the study of stayers in the Mexican village of Zacualpan and argues that the ability to stay is the consequence of family life strategies with mobility frequently facilitating immobility. For example, some family members leave to enable others to stay, and some leave now to enable staying in the future. Ye's study

in rural China incorporates a life course perspective to demonstrate the fluidity of mobility and immobility. He reports on the structure and agency of immobility and identifies stayers as a heterogeneous group in terms of personal attributes, household compositions, motivations, and family livelihood strategies. In common with Mata-Codesal (2018), Ye concludes that not all stayers are "left behind" stayers and that the decision to stay or leave is not made once in a lifetime. Instead, the decision is renegotiated several times with an individual moving between migrant and stayer status and between different stayer types.

The fourth paper, by Haartsen and Stockdale (2018), concentrates on the family formation life stage and asks, in line with Halfacree (2012), why have young families who moved to the rural northern Netherlands stayed? By adopting the "elective belonging" (Savage, Bagnall, & Longhursts, 2005) and "selective belonging" (Benson & Jackson, 2012; Watt, 2009) concepts, Haartsen and Stockdale (2018) find that while *electing* to belong to a rural residence newcomer families were *selective* in developing belonging to the rural place. Their paper also predicts that the decision to stay will be renegotiated at later life stages.

In the penultimate paper, Barcus and Shugatai (2018) use the place elasticity concept (Barcus & Brunn, 2010) to consider place attachments from the perspective of Mongolian-Kazakh migrants and explore the different ways migrants remain connected to their home rural place. They find that stayers in the origin area of Bayan-Ulgii facilitate rural place attachments for migrants and serve as anchors for rural ethnic identity. The immobile are strategic keepers of the local culture whose continued residence in the rural place of origin facilitates an at-a-distance relationship with the rural by out-migrants.

The final paper, by Burholt and Sardani (2018), concentrates on later life and uses cross-sectional data from Cognitive Function and Ageing Study Wales to investigate the support networks of older stayers in rural Wales. They note important differences between stayers and non-stayers in terms of their support networks and compare areas with low and high population turnover (viewed as "ageing in place" and "ageing places," respectively). They suggest that ageing in place is more likely in areas with stable rural populations (low in- and low out-migration) with those ageing in place more socially engaged in "locally integrated" support networks or more marginalised in "family dependent" support networks. By contrast, places with youth outmigration and in-migration by older cohorts (high population turnover) can be considered ageing places characterised by other support networks ("community focused" and marginalised "private restricted"). The results have implications for policy and services. Planners need to improve/help the marginalised support networks—that is, family dependent support in ageing in place and private restricted support in ageing places.

4 | STAYER TYPES, LIFE STRATEGIES AND RURAL PLACE IDENTITIES

Individually and collectively these papers provide additional and new insights on different aspects of staying and stayers in a rural context. They begin to address some of the under-researched themes noted earlier and importantly demonstrate the value of adopting an

immobility perspective. The collective contribution of the special issue is organised around three themes.

4.1 | Staying as a deliberate act: Stayer types

Although different definitions of stayers are used by authors in this issue, each adopts an immobility perspective and distinguishes stayers from non-stayers. The papers challenge a view of immobility as the “flip side” to mobility, a default or “no action” outcome. They demonstrate great diversity among stayer types and present a much more positive perspective to staying than previous studies.

Mata-Codesal (2018) identifies three types of immobility or stayers. “Desired immobility” includes individuals with both the desire and ability to stay. “Involuntary immobility” includes those wishing to leave but lack the ability to do so. This group equates to being “stuck” in the rural. “Acquiescence immobility” relates to individuals who lack clear aspirations to move or stay; they are lukewarm about either and equate to “just-happened” stayers. Few examples of involuntary and acquiescence immobility are observed. Ye does identify what he calls “defacto rural stayers,” that is, those who have no choice but to stay in the rural by virtue of China's household registration system (*Hukou*). However, Ye also identifies deliberate stayers. These include former peasant migrant workers who return to stay in the home village (*de jure* rural stayers) and staying families who do not have any family members working in the cities (actual rural stayers). Staying as a deliberate action is also reported among rural newcomers by Haartsen and Stockdale (2018) who distinguish “convinced stayers” from “children-led stayers.” While neither newcomer group held firm plans to stay when they first moved to the rural area, by the time of interview five to 10 years later, the convinced stayers envisage staying for as long as possible and children-led stayers for as long as children reside at home. There are, therefore, multiple stayer types: those identified in this special issue are far from an exhaustive list and future studies should seek to contribute to this multiplicity by exploring different spatial, economic, social, and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, by acknowledging the agency of stayers—that staying is a deliberate choice—we begin to interpret immobility/staying in positive terms. For example, Erickson et al., 2018 state:

.... If we allow for staying to be a deliberate choice that individuals make in light of the variety of desires and goals that they have for their lives, the assumption that high attachment and low satisfaction marks being stuck may not be correct. Instead of being stuck, attachment to a community would mark a genuine evaluation of how one feels about the place they live.

High community attachment then leads to a deliberate choice to stay, despite low levels of satisfaction with the community or its services. Adopting a similar immobility perspective leads Ye to conclude that the people left behind are not necessarily stuck. The Chinese word for left behind (*liushou*) means those who stay and hold the fort, those who stay and wait for migrants to return. Stayers, therefore, maintain the village home for when migrants return and

facilitate ongoing attachments and ties to the rural (see also Barcus & Shugatai, 2018).

4.2 | Life strategies: Mobility and immobility as relational practices

Each paper demonstrates that immobility is rarely devoid of mobility influence: Staying and migration are frequently connected, interrelated, and complimentary within deliberate life strategies. In other words, staying is connected to other people and life projects (Hjalm, 2014) and mobility and immobility are relational practices (Barcus & Halfacree, 2018; Coulter et al., 2016; Urry, 2007). It is therefore unhelpful to consider mobility and immobility as binary opposites or as dualistic either/ or, which is frequently the case when a migration perspective is adopted.

Mata-Codesal (2018) acknowledges mobility as “an instrumental resource to achieve the aim of staying put.” In certain geographical contexts, such as China (Ye, 2018) and Mexico (Mata-Codesal, 2018), the migration of some family members enables other members to stay, and to move enables that family member to (return and) stay in the future. Might similar connections between immobility and mobility exist in other geographical contexts? What are the life strategies of contemporary stayers in a western context? The limitations of immobility may also be overcome via mobility. Ye finds that commuting to work (mobility) enables staying, and Barcus and Shugatai (2018) show that stayers remain connected to migrants via social media, family phone/skype calls, and visits to the migrant's place of residence. Such connections between immobility and mobility are rarely investigated or are considered from a migration perspective only: For example, Brown, Champion, Coombes, and Wymer (2015) examine the commuting behaviour of migrants to the English countryside. From an immobility perspective, it is important to also ask, does an ability to commute on a daily or weekly basis enable an individual or family to stay? Similarly, do contemporary “virtual” connections with other people and other places facilitate staying?

(Im)mobilities also differ among family members. In some of the papers, life strategies and immobility are found to be highly gendered. Ye alleges a “double coercion” which favours females staying in rural China. First, although a couple's decision as to who stays and leaves is based on the potential employment opportunities and incomes for each, men are better educated and therefore possess greater migrant work opportunities. Second, a gender bias culture exists where it is taken for granted that women will stay and care for children and elderly family members. Inevitably, men leave and women stay. In other parts of the world too, where gender roles are more egalitarian, gender is a deserving research theme in immobility studies. Burholt and Sardani's study, for example, notes that older rural stayers are more likely to be women. Future gender and immobility research might usefully build on the work of Cooke (2013b) on tied stayers and tied migrants or that of Krange and Skogen (2007: 219), who in relation to young males choosing to stay in rural Norway, claim that staying is

... a strategy to realise a modern life project and to avoid marginalization.

(Im)mobilities also differ in relation to life course stage. Individuals and families are found to move between the status of migrant and

stayer over time (Erickson et al., 2018; Haartsen & Stockdale, 2018; Mata-Codesal, 2018; Ye, 2018). This accords with Hjalms (2014) conclusion that the decision to stay (or leave) is repeated multiple times over the course of a lifetime. The predictors of staying for young adults are notably different from those of older age groups (Erickson et al., 2018). Staying in a rural location is preferred at the family formation life stage (Haartsen & Stockdale, 2018) but most of these couples envisage a renegotiation of staying or leaving at subsequent life stages. The prospect of renegotiating the decision to stay in response to future life events is also raised by Ye and by Erickson et al., 2018. Therefore, specific questions to ask in relation to staying are as follows: does being a past migrant (who has chosen to stay at a specific life stage) increase the likelihood of moving again at a later life stage? Is a stayer who has already stayed for several life stages more likely to stay in the future? Notwithstanding Fischer and Malmberg's (2001: 369) conclusion that

... people with a long duration of stay are more prone to remain.... the relationships between current migrant/stayer status and future (im)mobility at different life stages are under-researched.

4.3 | Place and rural identities

A strong recurrent theme in all of the papers is "place": in particular, the role of place in staying and the role of stayers in places. First, in terms of the role of place several papers address the acceptable rural place attributes which facilitate staying. Erickson et al., 2018 find that community attachment, as a measure of one's sense of rootedness to a community, is a substantially stronger predictor of being a stayer than personal or community characteristics, or the levels of satisfaction with the community or its services. Mata-Codesal (2018) too reports on the conditions under which immobility is possible and acceptable and refers to "minimum material levels of comfort ... deemed as acceptable [to enable staying]." None of her interviewees considered migration to be good in itself. Instead, migration "enabled being able to live a good life locally in future." Staying possessed clear advantages, such as having family close by, knowing others in the community and local customs, helping each other out, or simply having ancestors buried in the local cemetery. The place attributes permitting staying, community attachment, rootedness, and sense of belonging, therefore, feature strongly among stayers. Haartsen and Stockdale (2018) find that their interviewees frequently accept the physical limitations of the rural, such as sparse or distant services and facilities, to experience social aspects of rural life (socially inclusive, friendly, and strong community spirit) which they value more highly. The limitations of the physical environment were overcome by frequent visits to urban centres. Comparisons were commonly made to former urban places of residence and visits to family and friends in former urban residential areas reaffirmed their choice for the rural, and in that way enabled stayers to stay. Cultural aspects of place are reported by Barcus and Shugatai who allege that stayers "possess a range of characteristics that collectively create a continued sense of place". They anchor cultural identities to place. However, by "performing" (Halfacree & Merriman, 2015) cultural aspects of the rural via immobile populations, it is

pertinent to ask if this represents a nostalgic view of the place or contemporary rural identity? Among Dutch newcomers to the countryside, some social aspects of the local rural culture are perceived as too traditional (Haartsen & Stockdale, 2018), whereas among Mongolian outmigrants these social aspects represent cultural rural identity, although not modern living conditions (Barcus & Shugatai, 2018). Mongolian outmigrants' continuing connections with home and with stayers as the keepers of ethnic identity and cultural traditions are maintained via multiple mobilities. Again, these examples show evidence of the linkages between staying and mobility. Such mobilities include social media; telecommunications; annual visits by migrants to the rural "home" or sending children there on holiday to learn cultural ways, language, etc.; and stayer family members visiting migrants at their destination.

Second, turning to the role of stayers in places, the adoption of an immobility perspective demonstrates that stayers are a valuable community resource. This is a far cry from the negativity associated with staying evident in migration discourse. Those who stay continue the family farm, care for children and older family members, and enable others to migrate and 1 day return (Mata-Codesal, 2018; Ye, 2018). The agency of stayers is further demonstrated by Barcus and Shugatai (2018): those who stay permit migrants to remain connected to not only their home rural place but also to their ethnic culture. Erickson et al., 2018 suggest that from a policy perspective stayers can be viewed as community assets. Burholt and Sardani suggest that older stayers not only receive support from family members who have remained close by (family dependent support networks) but provide support to younger generations (for example, by providing childcare to grandchildren). Ye highlights the entrepreneurial capabilities of stayers. Stayers as a significant rural resource also featured in a number of papers recently presented to a Working Group on *Countryside connections: Staying in the Countryside* (convened by Haartsen and Stockdale, 2018) at the European Congress of Rural Sociology (Krakow, July 2017). The entrepreneurship of female stayers in particular was evident (Ikonen, 2017; Sireni, Jolkkonen, & Lemponen, 2017). The contributions of stayers can, nevertheless, be selective: newcomers who stay are sometimes selective of a subsection of the rural community which is conducive to their life stage (Haartsen & Stockdale, 2018). How lives play out as stayers, the everyday lived experiences of stayers, and the contributions they make to rural places represent avenues for future research.

To summarise, the value of taking an immobility perspective is amply demonstrated in this collection of papers. Evidence is provided that staying is often a deliberate life strategy, which enables stayers to live a rural lifestyle and/or the rural good life. This decision, nevertheless, is renegotiated over the course of a lifetime, and immobility and mobility are found to be relational practices. Place is important with stayers maintaining social networks and rural identities: it also enables leavers to remain connected to the rural including to rural cultures and traditions. Not only does the collection shed new light on immobility and staying, but the immobility perspective adopted sheds a different light too on migration and migrants. For example, leaving can be a deliberate strategy to enable aspiring stayers to remain.

5 | AN EMERGING RESEARCH AGENDA ON IMMOBILITY/STAYING

According to the immobility perspective that we have adopted in this special issue, we call for immobility to join mobility as a central theme in geographical inquiry and suggest possible avenues for future research.

Immobility/staying are not the opposite, or residual, of migration. Moreover, there are different types of stayers which so far have not been fully researched. Future studies need to go beyond *non-mover* definitions and seek to unravel the diversity of stayer types and staying processes. Indeed, in an era of *Big Data*, accompanied by the growth of long-term longitudinal data, there are considerable opportunities for researchers to consider both migration *and* immobility perspectives. Arguably, researchers have yet to seriously interrogate their datasets in relation to immobility. The inclusion in this special issue of papers by Erickson et al. (2018) and Burholt and Sardani (2018) illustrates the value of doing so. Other quantitative studies could address some of the many unanswered questions regarding immobility: we do not know, for example, how many people stay, how trends have changed over time, what might be the spatial or cohort differences in immobility. Moreover, can immobility trends and patterns be explained using demographic and socio-economic variables and modelling techniques? In some countries, such as Sweden and the Netherlands, national datasets contain information about parents and grandparents. An analysis of these variables would permit new insights to be gained on stayers' long-term intergenerational connections to place.

The papers included in this special issue demonstrate strong life course dimensions and life strategies to staying and strong connections between immobility and mobility. Nevertheless, there are further research opportunities. First, staying over multiple life stages (adolescents, union formation, family formation, empty nest, retirement, failing health, and widowhood). Longitudinal studies seeking to capture different life events using, for example, biographical and life history approaches can shed considerable light on different types of stayers, the decision to stay and its influences, and the everyday experiences of staying as one transcends each of life's key stages. Moreover, it permits further investigation into why migrants who move at one life stage then stay at subsequent life stages (that is, build on the work of Halfacree & Rivera, 2012; Haartsen & Stockdale, 2018), and a testing of the hypothesis that having stayed for several life stages a stayer is more likely to stay in the future. Second, further research could take a linked-lives perspective to staying. This would permit fuller investigations into family life strategies, who stays (or moves, or returns) and when, what are the roles played by different family members, peers, or the home community in the decision to stay. Third, future studies might explore how contemporary mobilities (in terms of daily/weekly mobilities, virtual mobilities, and multiple residences) enable stayers to stay. The virtual world and social media means that an individual does not have to move to be connected to other people or places. Dual or second home ownership means one can work elsewhere during the week yet retain their primary residence in the choice of place "to stay," in the same way, daily commuting permits staying. Arguably, therefore, contemporary forms of mobility and aspects of the mobility turn (Cresswell, 2011) accommodate staying and residential immobility.

There is much to learn about cultures of staying (especially in a rural context). Future research could usefully study the influence of family, peers, community, senses of home and belonging, rootedness, physical and social place attachments, etc. Previous work on these is not only dated but largely adopts a migration discourse which portrays staying as a negative act associated with traditional values and expectations. New and contemporary thinking on the culture of staying is necessary. This should be considered in terms of contemporary and evolving rural futures: ageing places (Burholt & Sardani, 2018), the construction of the new countryside (Ye, 2018), and keepers of place-based ethnic identities and cultures (Barcus & Shugatai, 2018). An exploration of contemporary forms of elective and selective belonging (Haartsen & Stockdale, 2018) of different types of stayers may also further explain residential satisfaction and cultures of staying.

The everyday lives and experiences of stayers have not been adequately researched. Halfacree and Merriman (2015) highlight the benefits of approaching migration as a performance. We contend that there are also benefits to be gained from approaching immobility and staying as a performance. Why do some remain "still" in a world characterised by mobility? Why do some fail to "follow the script" when there is a culture of moving (for example, by young adults from rural areas)? To view staying through the lens of "performance" supports our calls for an immobility perspective to be taken: one that focuses on stayers, their processes, experiences, and perceptions of staying. The process of staying is strongly related to social aspects of rural community life. For example, outmigrants may want rural traditions and cultures to stay alive with stayers fulfilling an important role (Barcus & Shugatai, 2018); however, newcomers that stay may find similar rural traditions and customs unattractive (Haartsen & Stockdale, 2018). These different perceptions could usefully also include spatial dimensions such as those who stay in their childhood home, the region of upbringing, the rural (but not necessarily their home rural area) and highlight not only additional stayer types, but multiple staying processes and experiences.

In rural areas which suffer from depopulation stayers are not only numerically important but across all rural areas stayers contribute to rural resilience and to the quality of rural life. Rather than being geographically stuck, left behind or an immobile population (as viewed from a migration perspective), stayers make important economic, social, cultural and governance contributions (Barcus & Shugatai, 2018; Burholt & Sardani, 2018; Mata-Codesal, 2018; Ye, 2018), and provide an important bridging link between the rural and external (people and capital) resources (Erickson et al., 2018). Future research should investigate the important role of stayers in the sustainability of rural communities.

Finally, unlike migration research, existing theory on immobility and staying is poorly developed. On the one hand, a mobile society is now assumed to be the norm, and on the other hand, sedentarism is a taken-for-granted philosophical position that perceives being settled as the "natural" state. While some of the papers in this special issue have adopted or adapted existing migration theories: the aspiration-ability model (Mata-Codesal, 2018), the place elasticity concept (Barcus & Shugatai, 2018), the selective belonging concepts (Haartsen & Stockdale, 2018) there remains a need to establish robust theoretical frameworks and theories specific to the study of immobility and staying.

This may include redefining what the natural state is: sedentarism or being mobile? In calling for immobility and staying to be put in the spotlight and for an immobility perspective to be taken in the study of stayers and staying, an opportunity (or challenge) exists for scholars to construct meaningful contemporary immobility theories.

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